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# WHY WE PERSUADE MEN:

## A SERMON

PREACHED IN

ZION CHURCH, MONTREAL,

ON SUNDAY, OCTOBER 27TH, 1872.

BY

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The following appeal is published by a few friends of Zion Church, who besought their Pastor to allow them to place it before the public, to which request he gave his consent, hoping that a blessing might result to its readers. It will be seen that it is chiefly to one principle in human nature to which appeal is in this form made. Another and different kind of appeal will be made in due course; but it has appeared to me that there is some danger in these days of overlooking the more grave aspects of our relation to a Righteous Ruler.

C. C.

## WHY WE PERSUADE MEN.

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### II. CORINTHIANS V., II v.

“Knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord, we persuade men.”

It is written of those who have repented of sin and put their trust in Christ, that there is for them now no condemnation. They are safe. This implies, of course, that those who do not repent and trust in Him, are liable to condemnation. There are a great number of you who trust in Christ. It was not so with you once. I rejoice with you in the joy and blessedness that are now and forever yours. But there are others of you of whom this is not true. You know well enough that you have not trusted in Christ. I am concerned on your account; so much so that it is laid on my heart to direct to you all, or nearly all, my words, based on what Paul wrote, in hope that it may lead you to “ponder the path of your feet,” so that, on your progress towards eternity, all your “ways may be established.” As sensible persons who desire to know the truth, and are not afraid to look at it, I beg of you attend to what I say, and then come to just what conclusion your calm judgment may dictate.

The Apostle Paul felt sure that it was possible for those who heard the Gospel from his lips to perish,—to go down to perdition, and there experience the most unutterable woes; and because he felt sure of this, he became very earnest in trying to induce them to do something to ward off so great a calamity. As ambassador for Christ, he besought them to become reconciled to God. Need I remind you, that it is quite as possible for you—each of you—to perish? It is. Whatever may be your present thoughts, your present comforts and prospects of earthly good, it is within the range of possibility that, when you die, you should go to a place where anguish of spirit and of body will be your portion. Probably this statement of what may be chafes your soul, and awakens your incredulity. Nevertheless, however disagreeable the thought and repulsive the anticipation—

like some unpleasant things of this life—it is most solemnly true. A few years only may be allotted to you on earth to labour, to eat and drink and sleep, to enjoy and struggle, to sin and hide your sin, and then you may experience what is meant by perdition, and utter “destruction from the presence of the Lord.”

There dwells in all minds of any degree of culture, an idea of the fitness of things. You perceive how prisons are fit places for thieves and murderers, and quiet, happy homes the suitable abodes of the honest and good. You profess to know what is proper for you in public and social life among your fellow-creatures. Now, whether you can see it or not at present, it may turn out to be the most fit and proper thing at the end of your life that you should experience the “terrors of the Lord” in perdition. I say it may prove to be most fit and proper, considering what your heart is towards God; so that the awful possibility of your being sent there will not be more awful than appropriate and wise.

It is hard for you, perhaps, to think how such an eternal catastrophe can come to pass. Probably it is *very* difficult; yet events do come to pass which once we could scarcely have imagined. Those who were ruined by the first earthquake would have once said that such a destruction was contrary to their experience and beyond conception. Few would have supposed, when looking on a gentle, playful, loving child that he would become that coarse, savage, detestable creature doomed to the gallows for his crimes. Thus, in the course of things, there are at work reasons and causes for the most unimaginable disasters. And whether or not you can exactly see how you shall become charged from an active—perchance, cheerful—inhabitant of our beautiful world to being an inhabitant of outer darkness—the abode of all horrors—I say again, it is very possible that you may learn the awful reality by personal experience. And to assist you to come to the same conclusion, I will state a few plain truths.

1st. *Some terrible things are said of God in the Bible.*

The *knowledge* which God has of us is something appalling.  
 “All things are naked and open to the eyes of Him with whom



we have to do." He "understandeth our thoughts afar off." "The darkness and the light are both alike to Him." "There is not a word on my tongue, but lo! O Lord, thou knowest it altogether." Therefore, we may be sure God is as well acquainted with all in our life as we are ourselves, and, indeed, much better; for He never forgets. The *holiness* of God is to us fearful. "He is of purer eyes than to *behold* iniquity;" and, therefore, when He sees it in us, there is danger of our being consumed. Seraphim and Cherubim continually cry, "Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord God Almighty." He proclaimed Himself, "I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children." "A God of truth, and without iniquity, just and right is He." "Justice and judgment are the habitation of His throne." The *Power* of God is overwhelming. He is the "Lord God Almighty." He "spread forth the heavens as a curtain." "The inhabitants of the earth are as grasshoppers before Him." "The Lord spake—the earth trembled." "He fainteth not, neither is weary." "None can stay His hand, or say unto Him, 'What doest Thou?'" and, consequently, it is said of Him, "Our God is a consuming fire." "A fire goeth before Him and burneth up His enemies round about." "God is jealous, and the Lord revengeth; the Lord revengeth and is furious; the Lord will take vengeance on His adversaries, and He reserveth wrath for His enemies." "Who can stand before His indignation? and who can abide the fierceness of His anger?" "His fury is poured out like fire, and the rocks are thrown down by Him." "He shall come in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ." Is it not true, then, that some terrible things are said of God in the Bible?

2nd. *There are signs of His terrors in the ordinary world.*

The lightnings that scorch and kill are His ministers. Sweeping storms, lashing oceans to fury, and wasting the works of man, have their origin in God. Earthquakes, devouring body and soul, are God's agents. For what men call "Nature's laws" are really God's ordinances. They have no existence

apart from His creative will. Death—coming to young or old—comes by special Divine appointment. “It is appointed unto all men once to die.” God formed those general laws which, being disregarded in human society, have worked such terrible woes; and He also ordained those laws of your body and mind, the violation of which sometimes produces such intolerable anguish. In all these ways we see what a vast reserve force of destruction there must be in the Divine Nature. He who has designedly framed the mechanism of law and force—in body and mind—in such a way that collision with them entails so great and varied calamities, what can He not do to indicate His displeasure against sin, and make men feel how “evil and bitter a thing it is to sin against God?” Sometimes men regard, and very justly, the blessings of daily life as the small outcome of a goodness vast as infinity. And, in like manner, you may regard the terrible powers of destruction which are at work in the storm, in earthquake, in subterranean fires, in the pains of disease, in the convulsions of death, and the torment of conscience, as only the mere motion of a Divine Hand—the indicators of a power before which all defiant creatures must crouch, and finally the heavens “pass away.” Certainly God is not a weak, effeminate, soft Being who cannot lay waste and annihilate. There are signs around us that He can and will carry out His purposes, in spite of all human ingenuity and power.

3rd. *It is said that God did do terrible things in ancient times.*

We have an authentic record of certain terrors of the Lord experienced by creatures of ancient date. “The angels that kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation, He hath reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day.” Young and old, homes rich and homes poor, fathers, mothers, children—by thousands, and perhaps millions—were in one day deliberately, though sorrowfully, swept by God from life to death—from time to eternity—through the instrumentality of a deluge brought on for the express purpose. The inhabitants of two prosperous cities—Sodom and Gomorrah—were subsequently—without an exception—burnt up by fire and

brimstone sent from the Lord. Into every home of native Egyptians, in the course of one night, God sent the angel of death, and there smote all the first-born; and not long after that deed of desolation, He so arranged things as to cause the King of Egypt, and thousands of his soldiers, to meet with their destruction amidst the billows of the Red Sea. It was God who gave that terrible commission to the Israelites with regard to the abominable idolaters of Canaan, because they sacrificed their own children and otherwise defiled the land:—"Thou shalt smite them and utterly destroy them; thou shalt make no covenant with them, nor show mercy unto them."—*Deut. vii., 2.* The rebellious adherents of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram found to their grief that the earth was waiting the nod of Jehovah to devour them alive. Each one of 185,000 of Senacherib's army possessed a life as precious as any of ours, and was the centre of affection and interest to parents and kindred far away; and yet, in one night, the heavy hand of God was upon them, and they became all dead men. As a matter of history, then, we know that God did do terrible things in ancient times, because of the sins of men.

4th. *It is further said that God has prepared a fearful state for some of His creatures.*

It may be well for us to see what the Scriptures tell us upon this subject. There is a "place prepared for the devil and his angels,"—that is, his agents, whether those agents be demons or human beings. It is said, sometimes, to be a place of "outer darkness"—an abode of gloom, of sorrow, outside the circle of creation cheered by the light of God's smile. It is called a place where "their worm dieth not, and their fire is not quenched." In one chapter it is called a "lake of fire burning with brimstone." In another it is represented under the figure of a "bottomless pit," from whence there is no escape. It is also, to be made to "drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of His indignation, and to be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lord. And the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever; and they have no



rest day nor night." And in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, we read: "And in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom; and he cried and said, 'Father Abraham have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am tormented in this flame.'"

Now, what we have to observe is, that these things—whatever they may mean—have a place in the universe of God, and are carefully arranged for and ordained by God; for nothing of this sort can have place without God assigning it. The calmness and skill with which God has prepared for your food, your clothing and your comfort here below, are not greater than the equity and wisdom, attended with grief, with which He has prepared the bottomless pit and the fire that is never to be quenched. If there is foresight and power displayed in making heaven blessed for the saints, there is corresponding foresight and power in fitting things so that all whose proper place is perdition, shall find it to be just what its name implies—utter ruin. God owns hell as well as heaven. The one is His prison, the other His paradise. He has carefully made it what it is. And judging from the strong and intensely-expressive words of Scripture, we may conclude that the place which God has prepared for impenitent men is more awful and full of anguish than the human mind can bear to think.

5th. *It is also said that the day will come when God will actually send many hearers of the Gospel to this place He has already prepared.*

We know for a certainty that many of the people who once lived in Capernaum will find their portion in the "lake that burneth," for Christ said: "And thou Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shall be brought down to hell; for if the mighty works which have been done in thee had been done in Sodom, it would have remained unto this day. But I say unto you, that it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment than for thee." And, also, we know that many others who listened to our Saviour's words will experience the like doom. "And I say unto you that many shall come from the



East and the West, and shall sit down with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the Kingdom of Heaven, but the children of the Kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth." We are also told of some who will find their everlasting home there that lived and died expecting something very different. "Many will say unto me in that day Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name, and in thy name cast out devils, and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them: I never knew you; depart from me, ye that work iniquity." In the description given in the Matthew xxv., of the last judgment, the King is represented as saying to those on his left hand: "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels"—"These shall go away into everlasting punishment."

Now, the sum of the observations so far made by me is this:—We see clearly—as clearly as anything can be seen from the works and Word of God—that there is in God something by which it is proper to speak of Him as a "consuming fire;" that there is in Him.—beyond what He does in nature and has done among men of ancient days—a reserve force of destruction vast as infinity; that He has deliberately, though sorrowfully, prepared a place where the full force of His wrath may be experienced by men and devils; that the day will come when many who once listened to the good tidings of salvation by Christ will in that very place experience the pressure of His heavy hand. I am not aware of anything being more certain than these things. They are not the result of speculation; they do not depend upon elaborate reasonings: they are plain, obvious truths. And in the light of them I think I can say again what I said at the beginning:—It is possible that you may perish—may go down to a terrible perdition. It matters not whether you call it a *place* or a *state*. There is the prospect clearly before you. There is in God the reserve force to lay hold of you when the hour comes. There is the day fast approaching when God must decide whether or not He shall consign you to "everlasting destruction" from His presence. These words we are now dealing with are not playthings; they are not hollow

sounds. They are signs of solemn realities, which you may to your cost experience.

I speak to you who hear of Christ and shun Him. It is certainly a very grave and momentous circumstance that you may at last find yourselves in eternal woe. I don't know of anything to compare for seriousness, with this your critical position. It is of small use for you to wince under the Word of God, and then try and cheer up and cast off all these truths from your mind. That won't alter the facts of the case. It may be disagreeable to think of finding yourself at last where the "worm dieth not and the fire is not quenched;" but there is more than the disagreeable feeling, and *it may come to pass*. The men who live on a volcano may find it an unpleasant thing to think of being swallowed up some day; but their trying to forget the subject will not induce the earthquake to keep away.

Even the most insensible must see that there is something alarming in those passages of Scripture I have quoted. You perhaps don't like them. You wish they were not in the Bible. You think them dreadfully severe and sweeping. As for that, I cannot help it. I have simply related what is written. If you have any charge to prefer, prefer it before God. Accuse Him of being too terrible. Fight with the Eternal. There are the statements, and you have to deal with them, and to consider that they apply to you as much as they apply to any one else. I don't know whether you expect me to explain them away and soften them down so that you may be more easy in your minds. If so you are to be disappointed; for God's Word on this subject is too plain to be pared away, and no one has a commission to lessen the terrors of the Lord. The language may be sometimes figurative, but the reality—the spiritual reality—must correspond in intensity with the corporeal representation, or it would be nonsense. Even should you in your painful ingenuity eliminate much of what is supposed to be taught, there will in any case be a residuum quite serious enough to make your conscience uneasy. If you want to know why God has caused such fearful things to be written, the answer is, because the reality is coming on apace, and He would have you know it and take heed in due time. It is as though God would make you feel

that even you may miserably perish, so that you may in the end not perish. Certainly those to whom Christ will say "Depart ye cursed into everlasting fire" will perish; and from the description of their conduct on earth as nominal professors, it would appear that they were not worse in outward conduct than many who now attend our churches.

It is quite true that "God is Love;" that He is "slow to anger; not willing that any should perish." Yes, you cannot find words to tell how kind He is; and it is because this is so true that your perishing will be such a dreadful thing. The chief agony of perdition lies in being sent there by a God of Love, after having known of mercy through Christ Jesus; and the possibility of your perishing rests not on God's pleasure, not on His aversion to you, not on lack of power to forgive you, but on your slighting the love of your Father—your wickedly taking advantage of His kindness and tenderness to shun His presence, and to try and dispense with His fellowship.

If one could see all that lies in your hearts, doubtless, in many instances we should find the chief comfort and support of your life while living wickedly to be this—that in your case, by some favorable chance these dreadful things won't come upon you. Now, I pray you, don't deceive yourselves. There is as much chance for you, as long as you live in sin, to go to perdition as any one. "God is not mocked; whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap." There can be no delusion played off before the all-searching Eye of God. While you are talking and excusing yourself, the sentence may go forth and lay you low in an hour you think not.

I would, then, have you believe in the liability of your soul to destruction. Hold it as an indubitable truth that there is a chance—yea a serious possibility—of your going down to woe. Never forget that it is not *you* who are banished from Heaven of *yourselves*, but you *with the sins you love and cherish*. God *cannot and will not have your sins in Heaven*. Aversion to God, wilful shunning of Christ, delight in secret practices which God detests, these are the things which must go to their proper place; and if they are found in your soul when it leaves this world, your soul *must go with them* to a place and society where



such things are natural. There is no arbitrariness, no wrong in this. It cannot be otherwise. It is of no use for you to be near to Christ in the next life, if you are out of all sympathy with Him. The bliss of Heavenly life would be a greater bore and torment to you than any prayer and worship on earth can possibly be. There is Christ close by you now, willing and able to cleanse all your sins. There is the All-Kind Father waiting to embrace you, and the Spirit prompts your conscience aright. But if you *will* live in sin the chance of your perishing becomes a certainty. It is of no use to quiver and quail, and vainly hope. There is only one way by which you can rise above the danger; it is by submitting to the authority of God—by heartily abandoning your neglectful, ungodly ways, and casting out your unholy desires, and entrusting your soul to the care, the teaching, the elevating influence and the sin-cleansing power of Jesus Christ. He is the refuge set before you in the Gospel. “There is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus.” If you want some other Saviour, you must want and perish. If you refine away the truth of Christ to gratify your sinful tastes, you must refine away and perish. The terrors of the Lord are real, and are coming—coming fast. We *know* it because of Christ’s words. We speak of these things with fear and pain. We remind you again and again of your peril, and once more would persuade you to seek safety, purity, Heaven, Eternal Life—all that is dear to body and soul for this world and the world to come—in personal, living, loving union with Him who came to seek and to save the lost. “Now, then, we are ambassadors for God—as though God did beseech you by us; we pray you, in Christ’s stead, be ye reconciled to God.”